

Editorial

Road revenues need to go somewhere else

It's simply amazing how stubborn a bureaucrat can be when they have funding and a "plan" in their hands.

I'm talking about the South Mountain Freeway and how officials with the Arizona Department of Transportation and Maricopa Association of Governments keep talking about its need.

Last week, a MAG traffic engineer described at a South Mountain Citizens Advisor Team meeting how the freeway was important from a regional perspective. His point was that as the two sides of the Valley grow, it's important that commuters have a southern shortcut.

It's a nice theory. Unfortunately, it's no longer practical when the latest cost estimates of the project have skyrocketed to between \$1.7 and \$2.4 billion. And as we reported last week, that compares to other recent projects that were nowhere near as expensive, the closest being \$1.3 billion for 28 miles of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community's Loop 202 built in 2002.

Clearly, the South Mountain Loop 202 is a project that has priced itself onto the trash pile, and that's before one starts rejecting it for political reasons.

Still, there are a couple of other things.

One is this "regional" concept where we continue to encourage urban sprawl by saying it's OK to live in Casa Grande and work in Laveen, or live in Glendale and work in Chandler.

Some will have to of course, but does it make sense to promote it?

The other concern is misplaced priorities. If road warriors continue on with the South Mountain Freeway, how many years does that put back other projects that could be more valuable?

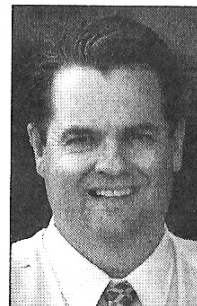
As an example, why not put some of the money into a Southeast Valley southern "303 Loop" that helps people get to Valley jobs vital to people living in Maricopa, Queen Creek, Florence and Apache Junction. After all, it's only a matter of time before the employment centers at Williams Gateway and the Chandler Muni start producing the thousands of jobs economic developers predict.

Finally, from the Department of Ironies, I came across an interesting item from a 1995 *AFN* while putting together today's "Trivia" item on page 2. The story quoted transportation officials who were debating the merits of buying a piece of land along Pecos Road near Akimel-A-al Middle School. The reporter described how the parcel was where the freeway was supposed to go, but quoted critics who said why secure land when ADOT didn't have the bucks in the bank for construction.

In the end, the purchase idea was rejected. Only then mayor Skip Rimsza seemed to have any foresight when he said it's better to plan ahead or the costs could go through the roof.

Can we get Skip in on this freeway fracas?

Brian Johnson can be reached at (480) 898-7910 or bjohnson@aztrib.com.



Ahwatukee Foothills News
April 12, 2006